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BIRDS COLLECTED DURING THE WHITNEY SOUTH SEA EXPEDITION. XXII¹

THREE NEW GENERA FROM POLYNESIA AND MELANESIA

BY ERNST MAYR

EDITHORNIS, new genus

Wing with ten primaries, second shorter than tenth; fourth, fifth, and sixth longest, subequal; secondaries soft, decomposed, slightly shorter than tenth primary.

Tail very short; rectrices hairlike, slightly longer than upper tail-coverts, equal to length of lower mandible from gape, or to the outer toe without claw. Wing-tip very short, about half the length of hallux and claw.

Bill strong, from gape to tip of maxilla slightly longer than head, about two-thirds of tarsus; bill laterally compressed, at nostrils more than twice as high as wide; maxilla and mandible curved; longitudinal groove on the sides of the mandible, two parallel grooves at the base of the gonys separated by a narrow ridge; large gray-blue horny frontal shield, about one and one-half times as long as the red part of the maxilla; the posterior edge of shield straight, not rounded; culmen and shield together shorter than tarsus; nostrils large, oval, not pervious; nasal groove short, broad, shallow and curved; lores and lower and posterior parts of circumocular space covered with short, scattered, brushlike feathers; eyelid and strip of skin (from gape under the eye to the postocular region) bare.

Legs and feet slender and long; lower third of tibio-metatarsus bare; tarsus about equal to middle toe plus claw, two-fifths of the length of the wing; plantatarsus scutellate on uppermost part, reticulate on lower part; toes long and slender, not webbed.

GENOTYPE.—*Edithornis silvestris*, new species.

Edithornis silvestris, new species

TYPE.—No. 227850, Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.; ♂ ad.; San Cristobal Island, British Solomon Islands; December 4, 1929; E. Mayr, W. F. Coultas, and W. J. Eyerdam.

Breast, throat, sides of head, crown and hind neck dark bluish slate-color, almost blackish on chin and sides of face; forehead covered with shield; scapulars, interscapulium, wing-coverts, and secondaries brown-black with an olive tinge; lower flanks, under wing-coverts, under tail-coverts, thighs, lower back, and rump dull (brownish) black; no light bars or stripes anywhere on the body.

"Iris chocolate, feet and bill bright scarlet, shield dark gray-blue, testes small; weight 450 grams."

Wing, 149 mm.; tail, 40; culmen and shield, 56; maxilla from gape, 41; tarsus, 60; middle toe with claw, 59; outer toe with claw, 46.

¹Previous papers in this series comprise American Museum Novitates, Nos. 115, 124, 149, 322, 337, 350, 356, 364, 365, 370, 419, 469, 486, 488, 489, 502, 504, 516, 520, 522, and 531.

This remarkable new rail stands out among the numerous discoveries of new species by the Whitney South Sea Expedition. It is a type quite by itself and apparently has no close relative. Of all the rails known to me, the extinct (?) Samoan rail *Pareudiastes* shows the greatest likeness to *Edithornis*.

It gives me pleasure to name this genus in honor of Mrs. George F. Baker, Jr., who has shown so much interest in the progress of the Whitney South Sea Expedition.

Edithornis differs from *Pareudiastes* by having bill and feet much more developed. The frontal shield is larger and the feathering on the sides of the head is different. Tarsus and feet are comparatively much longer.

I can say very little about the habits of this bird, which was collected by one of our native hunters. According to them, this bird, which they call "Kia" (pronounced Keéa), lives in the dense undergrowth of the mountain forest. Apparently it does not fly very much, if at all, and is hunted by the natives with dogs. The bird seems to be very rare, as we did not succeed in getting a second specimen in spite of all the inducements I offered, realizing at once the value of this new genus.

The locality where the bird was discovered is the village Húno gárahā or Hanagárahā, in the center of San̄ Cristobal Island, about ten to twelve miles south of Wanoni Bay. The village is at an altitude of about 1900 feet, but the mountains in the vicinity go up to almost 4000 feet. The whole region is covered with primeval mountain forest intermingled with native plantations and some secondary growth. Numerous brooks and creeks cut deep in the steep slopes of the mountains, but no lakes, ponds, or swamps were seen by us or reported by the natives. Nevertheless *Amaurornis olivaceus* and *Hypotaenidia philippensis* were found at the same locality, two rails which are frequently found in the Solomon Islands far away from water. They seem particularly fond of the dense undergrowth in secondary formations. *Edithornis*, however, is probably more a true forest bird than either of the two other species.

The other bird life was characteristic of the hills of the Solomon Islands and contained several other new species and subspecies belonging to the genera *Petroica*, *Phylloscopus*, *Rhipidura*, *Sericornis*, and *Oreocincla*.

CICHLORNIS, new genus

Bill long, slightly curved, without marked notch on the maxilla, width equal to height at the nostrils; nostrils oval, situated on the lower edge of a shallow nasal groove, which is partly covered by an operculum; feathering of the forehead short,

not very stiff, reaching to the posterior margin and the middle of the upper edge of the nostril; gonys narrow; rictal bristles very weak, hardly visible.

Feet very strong and powerful, with long toes; tarsus long, longer than culmen, about two-fifths of the length of the wing, covered with large scales; toes long, middle toe with claw almost as long as tarsus, hind toe with claw (21 mm.) as long as culmen from base.

Wing short and round; fifth and sixth primaries longest, subequal; distance between first and longest primary (24 mm.) one-third of the length of the wing, thus shorter than tarsus; second primary about the length of secondaries; distance between longest secondary and longest primary less than half the culmen.

Tail long and strongly graduated; shortest tail-feather less than half the longest; tail-feathers narrow with strong, almost spiny shafts; tail in worn condition very pointed.

Plumage hard and compact, feathers on rump and flanks not dense nor elongated; no crest.

GENOTYPE.—*Cichlornis whitneyi*, new species.

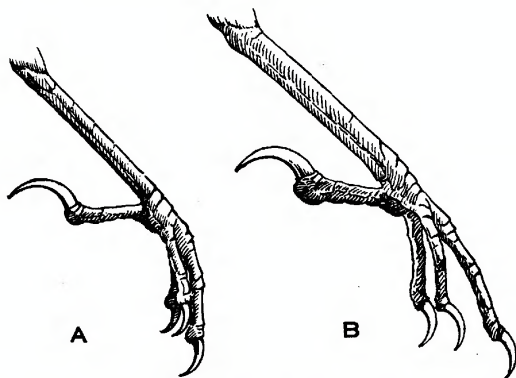


Fig. 1. A, foot of *Megalurulus*; B, foot of *Cichlornis* (tarsus heavier, toes more elongated). Natural size.

DISCUSSION OF RELATED GENERA

Megalurulus of New Caledonia apparently is the nearest relative of *Cichlornis*. I have seen only one specimen of *M. mariæ* Verreaux and its characters do not agree in every respect with the ones given by Sharpe in the key of the Timeliidæ, 'Cat. Birds,' VII, pp. 324-327. He says that in *Megalurulus* the distance between primaries and secondaries is as great as the length of the culmen, while in my specimen it is decidedly less. *Cichlornis* agrees with *Megalurulus* in the texture of the plumage, in the absence of a tuft of feathers on the lower back, in the shape of the nostril, the shape of the wing and the pattern of coloration; it differs, however, in its stronger bill and feet, in its much longer toes, in a shorter tail and in the stronger shafts of the tail-feathers.

The genera *Ortygocichla* and *Trichocichla*, although widely separated from *Megalurulus* by Sharpe in 'Cat. Birds,' VII, and in the 'Hand-list,' IV, seem to me to be rather closely related to *Megalurulus* and to *Cichlornis*. Both groups agree in the shape of the bill, the powerful feet, the length of the tail, the shape of the wing, and also the general color-pattern. The two groups differ, however, in the shape of the nostril, in the strength of the bristles, in the stronger fusion of the scutes on the tarsus, in the broader and softer tail-feathers, in the softer plumage generally, and in having a large tuft of soft, elongated feathers on the lower back and rump. The characters which are supposed to distinguish *Trichocichla* generically from *Ortygocichla* are of doubtful value. Reichenow (1891, Journ. Ornith., XXXIX, p. 130) lists three: the shape of the wing, the presence of bristles, and the scutellation of the tarsus. If I can conclude from a single specimen of each genus, then neither one of these three characters is of any value. I do not see the slightest difference in the wing, the bristles in *Ortygocichla* are as little developed as in *Trichocichla*, and the scutellation of the tarsus is equally vague in both "genera." Furthermore, I do not see any marked difference between the two "genera" in the development of the dorsal feather-patch, a point mentioned to me (*in litt.*) by Prof. Stresemann as possibly distinctive. It would, therefore, be advisable to put *Trichocichla* in the synonymy of *Ortygocichla*. The distribution of such a genus (New Britain and Viti Levu) is certainly very paradoxical.

***Cichlornis whitneyi*, new species**

TYPE.—No. 224398, Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.; ♂ ad. (testes "large"); Santo Island, New Hebrides; December 8, 1926; R. H. Beck.

Crown and narrow stripe extending from the gape under the eye to the upper ear-coverts, dark brown (between R. XXIX and mummy brown, R. XV); back, scapulars, and lesser wing-coverts lighter brown (about Prout's brown, R. XV), rump and upper tail-coverts slightly more rufous; lores, supercilium, broad post-superciliary stripe, throat, breast, and middle of abdomen ochraceous (between ochraceous tawny and ochraceous orange), richer on the breast and on the sides of the throat, paler in the middle of the throat, and paler and duller on the abdomen; lower flanks, crissum, thighs and under tail-coverts more brownish (near snuff brown, R. XXIX); tail-feathers brown with shafts blackish; wings dark brown, edges of wing-feathers cinnamon or light brown; axillaries and edges of under wing-coverts ochraceous.

"Iris brown, bill black, lower mandible more light colored, feet black."

The measurements of the only known specimen of this species are: wing, 72 mm.; tail, 70 (+X); culmen from base, 21, exposed 17, from anterior edge of nostril 12; tarsus, 28, middle toe with claw, 27; hind toe with claw, 21; distance between first and longest primary, 24; between longest primary and secondary, 8; and between longest and shortest tail-feathers, 38.

Very little is known about the habitat and life history of this species. Mr. Rollo H. Beck has kindly supplied the following information: "The country where I collected this bird was very steep. Primeval forest on rugged canyons at about 2500 feet elevation. Two or three others were heard, but kept concealed in the dense underbrush. As it happened, the trail into the interior of the island dipped sharply downward after 2400 feet was reached and the birds were found only for a short distance along the higher part of the trail examined. Probably the interior of the island, which is much higher, will yield more specimens when some one outfitted properly to make an extended stay penetrates into the high country. Our anchorage was not satisfactory for any length of time, so we had to return to the ship each night. We were anchored at a small village near the southwest end of the island."

MALACOLESTES, new genus

Bill strong, curved, with a distinct notch in the maxilla; nostrils small, round, partly covered by feathers and bristles; rictal bristles well developed, long; culmen longer than hind toe and claw.

Feet strong; tarsus covered with large scutes.

Wing pointed, wing-feathers also pointed, not round; first primary long; distance between longest primary and secondary less than length of culmen. Second primary equal in length to secondaries or longer; fifth primary longest.

Tail short, shorter than wing by more than the length of the culmen; tail-feathers slightly pointed.

Plumage very soft and silky; the body plumage, particularly on flanks and back, has an almost downy character.

GENOTYPE.—*Rectes tenebrosus* Hartlaub and Finsch.

This bird has been placed by the various authors into different genera usually with the remark that really a new genus should be erected for this rather aberrant form. Most frequently it was included into *Rhectes* (= *Pitohui*) and *Pinarolestes* (= *Myiolestes*). *Pitohui*, however, differs by its rounder wing, its larger nostrils which are not covered by bristles, its much longer and stronger tail, and its much harder plumage. *Myiolestes* differs by its rounder wing with a much shorter first primary, its weaker bill and its much harder plumage.

After I had worked out this description, I received field notes from Mr. W. F. Coultas, the collector of this bird, which fully confirm my opinion that it has no relationship to either *Pitohui* or *Myiolestes* of New Guinea. Mr. Coultas writes:

"This bird is called 'Tu Tau' by the natives of the Palau Islands, meaning the 'Morning Bird,' because his sweet little carol heralds the

approach of day. He never sings during the heat of the day, and in the evening, if one is close enough one can hear him crooning himself to sleep—more like our American Brown Thrasher who holds a quiet little song festival with himself just at dusk. This bird lives almost entirely on the ground and occasionally on very low bushes. He is usually found scratching around among the dead leaves for mollusca, worms, seeds, etc. He is one of the few real song birds it has been my pleasure to hear in the tropics.”